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British East Africa/Belgian Congo
Notes on Trip: Kabale to Bunia to Goma
Ruanda-Urundi/Uganda/Belgian Congo

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1. "Kabale, Uganda - October 10, 1952
We crossed from Ruanda to Uganda near Ruhengori. This part of Uganda is probably the best from the European standpoint. The pass we came over was 8,170 feet high, and here at Kabale we are at 4,500 feet, with cool nights and comfortable temperatures during the day. The main tribe here are the Waturi. They practiced contour farming before the white man arrived, but the Government has since regularized the whole business. The huts differ from those in Ruanda-Urundi in that they are mud, often white-washed, with thatch roofs instead of thatching throughout. The people look perhaps a little poorer. We saw a good many wearing rather ill-fitting skins as their only garments. The scenery is magnificent: a series of hills and valleys, densely settled, closely worked.
2. "At one point near Kabale we saw a little path leading off to the Mindoro Tin Mine. The mine proved to be one of the most primitive operations imaginable. It is run by two old English prospectors. In one thatch hut, about 8 by 10 feet, four negroes were pounding the rock ore into granules with hammers. In a second hut there was a crude flotation device in two saucepans, and the remnant was being roasted over a miserable little leaf fire in a shallow pan about 16 inches in diameter. The resultant product was about 75% tin, bagged in 75 pound bags, loaded into the oldest car in Uganda (run on oil and petrol which was mixed by shaking the car, and started by an interior crank), and taken to Kabale. Eventually it goes to Singapore, then to the US, and then perhaps back to Kabale in the form of a tin can with California fruit. As crazy as this operation was in terms of economics, the prospectors seemed happy, and were always hoping to find a bonanza or some niobium ore which is needed for jet engines.
3. "Kabale is the district headquarters for the British in this area, and is apparently used as a rest center for those in other parts of East Africa. The landscapes are magnificent, and I am constantly amazed at the high quality of the hotels.
4. "Kabale to Bunia via Mutwanga
Leaving Kabale and heading north, the country became considerably lower, and was somewhat like Ruanda on a less intense basis. It gradually got drier and more open with great herds of long horn cattle. Proceeding north we got to Bushenyl, past a few small lakes, the country becoming wetter but less densely peopled; and then onto the edge of the western Rift, overlooking the channel between Lake George and Lake Edward. In the distance we could see one herd of elephants and another herd of small beasts. We crossed this savannah plain in a sort of ferry, with a paddle wheel motor barge pushing the ferry. The road then passed along beside Lake Edward. Most of the people have been removed from the shores because of disease,

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but many have remained because of the fishing which provides an important source of protein to the natives both in Uganda and the nearby parts of the Congo. We had a difficult time at the Belgian Congo border, where it took us an hour and a half to cross. To our north, meanwhile, the Ruwenzori Range was unfolding (next to Mts. Kenya and Kilimanjaro, this is the highest in Africa). It is a great uplifted block of horst rather than a volcano. We went through elephant grass country and finally came to the Ruwenzori Hotel, Mutwanga.

5. "From Mutwanga we could see the craggy, snow-capped peaks, and some of the dense vegetation of the middle slopes. In front, to the west, stretched the Semliki Plain: elephant grass and scattered trees, in parts; elsewhere, especially along the rivers, there is dense vegetation of a rainforest character. (The Semliki Plain is the part of the Rift Valley occupied by the Semliki River flowing from Lake Edward to Lake Albert.) We crossed the Semliki River by ferry, using the current plus two polers, then climbed the western scarp to get up onto a relatively level plateau which drains off to the Congo. We went north into the Ituri Forest, a tropical rainforest of very great dimensions, in which reside the Ituri (pygmies).
6. "The pygmies have, to some extent, inter-married with the other local tribes, but there are still a number of pure pygmy villages, and we visited them, getting photographs for salt or cigarettes. They are very small. The men are powerfully built. (One headman looked like an ape man.) In the past, and to some extent now, the women were the hunters (we saw many out with little bows and arrows), and the blacksmiths. Now they do more of the farming.
7. "Every so often in the forests (in which some of the trees are 150 feet high), the natives are making clearings. Since the trees have great prop roots, they cut them down about ten feet off the ground. They then plant manioc, rice and vegetables, and struggle to keep them under control against the weeds. In a few years the soil gives out and the weeds take over, and the cycle begins anew. It is a tough life.
8. "We emerged from the forest surprisingly abruptly near Badiya; then went on through Irumu, a Government center, and to Bunia, a thriving commercial center.
9. "Bunia to Goma-Kasenyi via Butembo and Lubero
From Bunia we struck out for Kasenyi, thirty miles away on Lake Albert, passing through rolling country, mostly grass for a stretch, then down the escarp, which is one of the most distinct of the whole Rift Valley, and onto the plains, which are a wooded savannah. We crossed these for thirteen kilometers to Kasenyi, a port and fishing village. Kasenyi is a very run-down place.
10. "We arrived at Butembo and found the hotel to be one of the best in the Congo. It is at an elevation of a mile and, so, is quite cool. There are about 300 Europeans in this part of the Congo, most of them engaged in growing quinine, coffee and pyrethrium. Dairying is also common. On our way down from the hotel we saw several white children being carried to school by the natives in litters. It looked like the middle ages, and a little too colonial to suit us.

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11. "The area south of Butembo becomes very rolling, much the same kind of landscape as Ruanda-Urundi with one very important exception: there are almost no cattle. This has led to a very orderly set of terracing, and has kept erosion down to a minimum. It is altogether a lovely countryside with many native villages strung out along the summits or the ridges or along the back of a small divide. They appeared to grow a far greater variety of crops than elsewhere, including vegetables and small fruits.
12. "About forty miles farther along we came to Lubero, a territorial capital and commercial center at an elevation of 6,396 feet. It is one of the highest towns in the Congo. It is situated in a basin entirely surrounded by mountains, often forested. A considerable amount of wheat is grown in this area. As we came out of the basin we came up into an area that had a great density of altitude vegetation: lianas, moss hanging from the trees, great ferns and bracken on the ground. Then the country became less densely settled (though by the appearance of several very rich looking European estates, the soil was still good). We climbed to almost 8,000 feet on a tortuous road; then down into a sort of broad basin and up again to the edge of the Kabasba escarpment where we could look down onto the seemingly flat plains of the Rwindi and Rutshuru - the central Rift Valley again. The southern end of Lake Edward lay to our left and the Volcanic Region (Viranga) lay way off to the southeast. It took us quite a time to wend our way down the escarpment, which is about as abrupt here as anywhere. Then in a few minutes we came to the Rwindi camp of Albert National Park, which consists of a main building with restaurant and a double line of rondavels (circular huts with thatch roofs). In the Volcanic Region the volcanoes separate the Nile and the Congo basins. There are eight volcano basins from west to east: Nyamulagira - 10,020 feet; Tshaninagongo or Nyiragongo - 11,378 feet; Mikenno - 14,544 feet; Karisimbi - 14,783 feet; Visoke - 12,172 feet; Sabinio - 11,583 feet; Gahinga - 11,398 feet; Muhauura - 13,537 feet. There are also a great many subsidiary cones and small craters about. The first two of the above are still active, having erupted in 1938, 1948, and 1951. It took 11 months for the lava to reach the lake however. To the north of the volcanoes there are few people living. There is recent lava here which has not completely broken down to form soil. But a sort of thicket vegetation grows between the blocks of lava. To the south the lava is decomposed, fertile and well-cultivated.
13. "A little south of Rutshuru we went off the road a little to see the falls of that river. Past that, the road climbed to 6,560 feet and passed between the Mikenno and Tshaninagongo volcanoes.
14. "We arrived at the twin cities of Goma-Kasenyei (Goma is in the Congo, Kasenyei just across the border in Ruanda) which are on the north shore of Lake Kivu, the Riviera of the Congo. This is another booming area, with building in progress at a great rate throughout.
15. "We left Goma-Kasenyei crossing a series of lava fields a little west of the twin cities. The fields produced by the 1938 flow had a fair amount of vegetation. The 1948 flow which reached the lake and almost cut off Sake Bay (it did cut off one corner of it), looked quite fresh, and had only a few little ferns scattered about. We passed a small crater lake, very green, which is said to have a subterranean connection with Lake Kivu, and in which the same species of fish are found.

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16. "The road was the worst we have found in the Congo. Most of them are quite good. For one forty mile stretch it was one way, twisting up and down the mountains along the west side of Lake Kivu. In places, the people from Ruanda have come over and are settling with their cattle. Elsewhere there is practically nothing but forest, while European farmers have estates of pyrethrium, cinchona, etc., usually planted in marvelous gardens."

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